



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DREAMS AND THEIR MYSTERIES.

BY ELIZABETH BISLAND.

LIFE-LONG familiarity with the astonishing phenomena of sleep, with the trooping phantoms inhabiting the dusk realms of slumber, has so dulled wonder at the mystery of our double existence of the dark, that night after night, with calm incuriousness we open the door into that ghostly under-world, and hold insane revels with fantastic spectres, weep burning tears for empty griefs, babble with foolish laughter at witless jests, stain our souls with useless crime, or fly with freezing blood from the grasp of an unnamed dread ; and, with the morning, saunter serenely back from these wild adventures into the warm precincts of the cheerful day, unmoved, unstartled, and forgetting.

Prove that you have the hypnotic power to make a man feel pain or pleasure without material cause, that you can force him to believe himself a soldier, say, or a woman, or that he is three feet high, or two persons at once, and he will gape upon this occult mastery with awe and wild surprise—he, who every twenty-four hours of his life, with no more magic potion than healthy fatigue, with no greater wonder-working weapon than a pillow, may create for himself phantasmical delusions beside which all mesmeric suggestions are but the flattest of dull commonplace.

The naïve egotism of superstition, which saw in the majestic movements of the solar system only prognostications concerning its own bean crop, could discern nothing more in this dream-world than the efforts of the supernatural powers to communicate (in their usual shuffling, incompetent fashion) the events of the future to man—that sole centre and concern of the universe. The modern revolt from this childish-

ness has swung the pendulum of interest so far up the other curve of the arc, that there prevails a foolish fear of attaching any meaning or importance whatever to the strange experiences of sleep, and an unscientific avoidance of the whole topic which is no less superstitious and puerile. The consequence of which foolish revulsion has been that one of the most curious functions of the brain is still, in a period of universal investigation, left unexamined and unexplained. Some dabbling there has been in the matter, but so far no tenable explanation has been offered of those strange illusions of sleep with which all mankind is familiar. The results up to this time of this dabbling are for the most part of little more value than the contents of the greasy, well-thumbed dream-books that formed the only and dearly beloved library of eighteenth century milkmaids and apprentices. The greater portion of such labor as has been bestowed on the subject has been mainly directed toward efforts to prove the extreme rapidity with which the dream passes through the mind and that it is some trivial outward cause, at the moment of rousing from slumber, such as a noise, a light, or the like, which wakes the brain to this miraculous celerity of imaginative creation. The general conviction that dreams occur only at the instant of awakening shows how little real attention has been bestowed upon the matter, since the most casual observation of "the dog that hunts in dreams" would show that he may be chasing the wild deer and following the roe in the grey Kingdom of Seeming without breaking his slumbers. He will start, and twitch and give tongue after the phantom quarry he dreams himself pursuing, and yet continue his sleep without an interval. But given the truth of any one of these assertions, still the heart of the mystery has not yet been plucked out, since it is not explained why a noise or gleam of light—such as the senses are quite familiar with in waking consciousness—should, at the moment of rousing, cause the brain to create with inconceivable rapidity a series of phantasmagoria in order to explain to itself the familiar phenomena of light or sound.

Dr. Friedrich Scholz, Director of the insane asylum at Bremen, in his recent volume upon "Sleep and Dreams," gives an example of this rapid effort of the brain to deal with the sensations felt by the sleeping body: "I dreamed of the Reign of Terror, saw scenes of blood and murder, appeared before the Revolutionary

Tribunal, saw Robespierre, Marat, Fouquier-Tinville, all the personages of that time of horrors, argued with them, was finally after a number of occurrences condemned to death, was carried to the place of execution on a cart through enormous masses of people, ascended the scaffold, was bound by the executioner to the board. The knife fell, and I felt my head severed from my body. Thereupon I awoke and found that a loosened rod of the bed had fallen on my neck like the knife of the guillotine, and this had happened, my mother assured me, at the very moment when I awoke."

That the mind should, merely because of the body's sleep, be able to create a whole scene of a terrible drama with a rapidity impossible when all the functions are awake and active, is incredible. The only function of the brain capable of this lightning-like swiftness of vision is *memory*. To create requires a certain effort and consumes a certain period of time, but a scene once beheld, an adventure once experienced and vividly impressed upon the memory, can be recalled in its minutest detail in a lapse of time not reckonable by any of our methods.

That the sensitive plate of the brain never loses any *clear* picture once received has been proved over and over again, beyond the possibility of a doubt. The picture, the sensation, may be overlaid and hidden for long periods beneath the heaps of useless lumber that the days and years accumulate in the mind's storehouse, but need, or accident, or a similarity of circumstance, will restore the forgotten possession, oftentimes with startling effect. There is a well-authenticated instance of a girl who, during an attack of febrile delirium, spoke in a language that no one about her could understand, and which was finally discovered to be Welsh. The patient, both before and after her illness, knew but a single word of the language. No one could explain the matter until finally it was found that she had been born in Wales, and as a child had learned the language, but had afterwards entirely forgotten it.

It is commonly known, too, how in the struggle of the body against death by water the memory, stirred to furious effort also, reproduces all her stores at once, possibly in a frantic endeavor to find some experience which may be of use in this crisis.

It is broadly asserted by many that the memory retains each and every experience which life has presented for its contempla-

tion, but this is hardly true. It makes to a certain extent a choice, and chooses oftentimes with apparent caprice. To demonstrate the truth of this, let one endeavor to recall the first impression retained by his childish mind and it usually proves to be something extremely trivial. A lady, interrogated as to this, declared her first clear memory was a sense of the comfort to her tired little two-year-old body of the clean linen sheets of the bed at the end of a most perilous and adventurous journey, of whose startling incidents her memory had preserved nothing. Again this capricious faculty will seize upon some few high lights in a vivid picture and reject all the unimportant details. As a rule, however, it is the profound stirrings of the emotions which wakes the memory to activity. A woman never forgets her first lover. A man to the end of his life can recall his first triumph, or his most imminent danger, and a trifle will often, after the lapse of half a century, fill the eye with tears, make the cheek to burn, or the heart to beat with the power of the long-passed emotion, preserved living and fresh by the memory.

That the memory uses in sleep the material it has gathered during the day, and during the whole life, no dreamer will deny; but here again it is capricious; some parts of the day's—the life's—experiences are used, others rejected. Added to these natural and explainable possessions of the memory, are a mass of curious, conflicting, tangled thoughts, which are foreign to our whole experience of existence, and which, when confused with our own memories, makes of our nights a wild jumble of useless and foolish pictures. If it be true that it is by some outward impression upon the senses that dreams are evoked, that it is the endeavors of the somnolent mind to explain to itself the meaning of a noise, a light, a blow, which creates that delusion we call dreams, then it is not upon the stores of our own memories alone that the brain draws for material, since the falling rod awoke in the mind of Dr. Scholz's dreamer a picture of the French revolution, which he had never seen, and different in detail and vividness from any picture his reading had furnished.

Heredity is an overworked jade, too often driven in double harness with a hobby, but the link between generation and generation is so strong and so close that none may lightly tell all the strands of which it is woven, nor from whence were spun the threads that tie us to the past. It is very certain, despite the

theories of Weismann, that the acquired characteristics of the parent may be transmitted to the child. The boy whose father walked the quarter-deck is, nine times out of ten, as certain to head for salt water as a sea-gull born in a hen's nest. The victim of ill-fortune and prisoner of despair who breaks the jail of life to escape fate's malice leaves a dark tendency in the blood of his offspring, which again and again proves the terrible power of an inherited weakness. Women who lose their minds or become clouded in thought at childbirth—though they come of a stock of *mens sana*—transmit the blight of insanity to their sons and daughters both ; and not only consumptive weakness and the appetite for drink are acquired in a lifetime and then handed on for generations, but preferences, talents, manners, personal likeness—all may be the wretched burden or happy gift handed down to the son by the father. Who then may say without fear of contradiction that the memories of passions and emotions that stirred those dead hearts to their centre may not be a part of our inheritance ? The setting, the connection, is gone, but the memory of the emotion remains. Such and such nerves have quivered violently for such or such a cause—the memory stores and transmits the impression, and a similar incident sets them tingling again, though two generations lie between.

Certainly animals possess very distinctly these inherited memories. A young horse never before beyond the paddock and stables will fall into a very passion of fear when a serpent crosses his path, or when driven upon a ferry to cross deep swift water. He is entirely unfamiliar with the nature of the danger, but at some period one of his kind has sweated and throbbed in hideous peril, and the memory remains after the lapse of a hundred years. He, no more than ourselves, can recall all the surrounding circumstances of that peril, but the threatening aspect of a similar danger brings memory forward with a rush to use her stored warning. When the migrating bird finds its way without difficulty, untaught and unaccompanied, to the South it has never seen, we call its guiding principle instinct—but what is the definition of the word instinct ? No man can give it. It but removes the difficulty one more step backward. Call this instinct an inherited memory and the matter becomes clear at once. Such memories, it is plain, are more definite with the animals than with us ; but so are many of their faculties, hearing, smell, and sight.

Everyone has felt many times in his life a sense of familiarity with incidents that have had no place in his own experience, and has found it impossible to offer any explanation for the feeling. Coming suddenly around a turn of a hill upon a fair and unknown landscape, his heart may bound with a keen sense of recognition of its unfamiliar outlines. In the midst of a tingling scene of emotion, a sensation of the whole incident being a mere dull repetition will rob it of its joy or pain. A sentence begun by a friend is recognized as trite and old before it is half done, though it refers to matters new to the hearer. A sound, a perfume, a sensation, will awaken feelings having no connection with the occasion.

A visitor for the first time to a tropical country was charmed with the excessive novelty of everything about him ; but suddenly one evening, being carried home in his chair by the coolie bearers, a flood of recognition poured over him like the waves of the sea, and for a few minutes the illusion was so strong as to leave him breathless with astonishment. He had the sense of having often done this before. The warm night, the padding of the bare feet in the dusk, the hot smell of leaves, were all an old trite experience. For days he struggled with that tormenting sense, with which we are all familiar, of being unable to recall a something, a name, that is perfectly well known—is “on the tip of the tongue,” as one says—but all in vain ; and in time the recognition grew fainter and more elusive with each effort to grasp it, until it slipped forever away into darkness. If such experiences as these are not inherited memories, what are they ?

With sleep, the will becomes dormant. Waking, it guards and governs ; chooses what we shall do and be and think ; stands sentinel over the mind and rejects all comers with which it is not familiar. Unless the thought comes from within the known borders of the body's own life, the will will have none of it. But overtaken by fatigue and sinking into slumber with the night, his domain is left fenceless and unpatrolled, for with the will goes his troop of watchmen, judgment, logic, deliberation, ethics ; and memory, ungoverned, and uncontrolled, holds a feast of misrule. The barrier between past and present melts away ; all his ancestors are merged into the individual ; the events of the day are inextricably tangled with those of two centuries since, and this motley play of time is called a dream.

A man going back but to his great grandparents has already fourteen direct progenitors and is heir of such strange or striking episodes of their fourteen lives as were sufficiently deeply impressed upon their memories to be transmittable. This alone is enough, one would think, to provide all the nights with material for the queer kaleidoscopic jumbling of leavings, with which the nimble mind diverts itself while its sluggish comrade snores, turning over the leaves of its old picture book alone in the dark, but there is no reason to believe that there is a limit to these inheritances.

One dreamer relates that the most vivid sensation her night memory holds is of finding herself standing alone, high up in a vast arena. It is open to the sky and the night is falling swiftly and warm. Everyone has gone but herself, but there is a tremulous sensation in her mind, as of very recent excitement, noise, and tumult. She is waiting for someone who is coming through the arched door on the left, and she rises to go. She feels the rough coolness of the stone beneath her hand as she helps herself to rise, and upon her throat and bosom she has a sensation of the light wool of her garment. It has the vivid familiarity of a personal and perfectly natural experience—so strong that, waking, she retains as keen a sense of it as if it was a happening of yesterday. This dreamer, whose night visions are many and of great vividness, remembers many more dreams of this type—momentary flashes of sensation of the trivial things about her, such as all persons have felt in their waking lives, only that the things about her in her dreams are totally unfamiliar to her waking brain. In one of these she is emerging from the back door of a small white house—intensely white in the glare of a fierce sun. The house seems square and flat-topped, built of stone and with no windows visible here in the rear. It opens on a narrow street of similar residences. A man is with her, dressed in a long black robe and wearing a curious black head-dress. He is reproaching her and remonstrating violently concerning her indifference in regard to religious matters. She looks away—annoyed and bored by his vehemence—and the whole picture vanishes. It was as clear, as natural and familiar as her own waking life, while it lasted. . . . The narrow street of white houses seemed the only possible form for a street—she had no consciousness of anything different or more modern. The man's

eager, stern face, with the heavy beard and the high head-dress looked in no way strange or unfamiliar. With that double consciousness with which we are all familiar when awake, she watched the movement of his lips and the wagging of his beard as he talked, full of a sense of distaste, and thought, while listening to his flow of clear words, "How tiresome these religious men are!"

Another dreamer—again a woman—was aware of standing in the dark, sword in hand (she seemed to be a man and the seeming was not strange to her), listening with furious pulses to a confusion of clashing blades and stamping of feet. Under the surface of passionate excitement the deeper sub-consciousness said: "All is lost! The conspiracy is a failure!" She was aware of a cool bravado which recognized the uselessness of attempting escape. The dice had been thrown—they had turned up wrong, that was all. Yet so vigorous and so courageous was the heart of this man that he was still buoyantly unafraid. There was a rush of bodies by him; the door swung back against him, crushing him to the wall, and a few moments later, under guard, he was passing through a long, low corridor of stone. The torches showed the groined arch above him, and, a cell being unlocked, for the first time he felt afraid. Inside was a big bear with a collar about its neck, and two villainous faced mountebanks sat surlily upon the floor. The man was very much afraid at the thought of such companions, for his hands were tied and he had no sword—yet he reasoned jovially with his guards, not wishing to show his real terror. After some protests his sword was returned to him and he stepped inside, again cheerfully confident. The door clanged to behind him and the dream faded. All the conditions of the dream, the change of sex, the strange clothes and faces, the arched corridor, the men with the bear, seemed to the senses of the sleeping woman perfectly natural. They were quite commonplace, and of course. For the most part however, her dreams are the fantastic hodge-podge common to dreamers, such as might result from the unsorted, unclassified memories of a thousand persons flung down in a heap together and grasped without choice. One curious fact she has noted is that though she is a wide and omnivorous reader, she has never had a dream or impression in sleep which might not have been part of the experience of some one of European or American an-

cestry. She is an ardent reader of travel and adventure, but never has she imagined herself in Africa, nor have the landscapes of her dreams been other than European or American.

Mr. Howells, in "True I Talk of Dreams," added confirmation on this point by saying that he had never been able to discover a dreamer who had seen in his dreams a dragon or any such beast of impossible proportions.

It suggests itself—*en passant*—that dragons and other such "fearful wild fowl" are not uncommon in the cataclysmic visions of delirium, but perhaps the potency of fever, of drugs, of alcohol, or of mania may open up deeps of memory, of primordial memory, that are closed to the milder magic of sleep. The subtle poison in the grape may gnaw through the walls of Time and give the memory sight of those terrible days when we wallowed—nameless shapes—in the primæval slime. Who knows whether Alexander the Great, crowning himself with the gold of Bedlam's straws, may not be only forgetful of the years that gaped between him and his kingly Macedonian ancestor. Ah, Horatio! does your philosophy plumb all the mysteries of life and of heredity?

Another interesting fact, in this connection, elicited by extensive and persistent inquiry, is that those who come of a class who have led narrow and uneventful lives for generations dream but little, and that dully and without much sensation; while the children of adventurous and travelled ancestors—men and women whose passions have been profoundly stirred—have their nights filled with the movement "of old forgotten far-off things and battles long ago." Again, inquiry has elicited the fact that many persons, while hovering on the borders of sleep, but still vaguely conscious, are accustomed to see pictures of all manner of disconnected things—many of them scenes or faces which have never had part in their waking life—drifting slowly across the darkness of the closed lid like the pictures of a magic lantern across a sheet stretched to receive them, and these, by undiscernable gradations, lead the sleeper away into the land of dreams, the dim treasure house of memory and the past.

If a dream is a memory, then the stories of their momentary duration are easily credible. The falling rod upon the sleeper's neck might recall, as by a lightning flash, some scene in the Red Terror in which his ancestor participated—an ancestor so nearly allied, perhaps, to the victim suffering under the knife as to

know all the agonies vicariously, and leave the tragedy bitten into his memory and his blood forever.

When the words heredity or instinct are contemplated in their broad sense they mean no more than inherited memory. The experiences of many generations teach the animal its proper food and methods of defence. The fittest survive because they have inherited most clearly the memories of the best means of securing nourishment and escaping enemies. The marvellous facility gradually acquired by artisans who for generations practice a similar craft is but the direct transmission of the brain's treasures.

In sleep the brain is peculiarly active in certain directions, not being distracted by the multitude of impressions constantly conveyed to it by the five senses, and experiments with hypnotic sleepers prove that some of its functions become in sleep abnormally acute and vigorous. Why not the function of memory? The possessions which during the waking hours were useless, and therefore rejected by the will, surge up again, vivid and potent, and troop before the perception unsummoned, motley and fantastic; serving no purpose more apparent than do the idle, disconnected recollections of one's waking moments of dreaminess—and yet it may hap, withal, that the tireless brain, forever turning over and over its heirlooms in the night, is seeking here an inspiration or there a memory to be used in that fierce and complex struggle called Life.

ELIZABETH BISLAND.